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AUTHOR Stratton, Beverly D.; Grindler, Martha C.
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ABSTRACT

The Apple/Polaroid Language Experience Approach is an extension of the language experience approach which combines photography (a form of communication) and word processing skills. It is considered a holistic approach because it is based on the whole language model of teaching literacy which develops reading skills naturally through the meaningful, functional use of language. Working with a college tutor, elementary students take some photographs that are then made into a book about themselves. The approach offers something for all students regardless of the mode(s) through which they learn best since all modes are incorporated. Learners use: (1) auditory mode when stories are read aloud and/or when a speech synthesizer is used; (2) the kinesthetic (motor) and tactile (touch) mode when they write and type the stories; and (3) the visual mode with photographs and when they read the stories. Motivation is provided through the use of photographs and word processing via the computer. Comprehension is built-in since the natural language of the learner is used. Children are given an opportunity to share something of importance--themselves. (RS)

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SMILE: Using Photography to Enhance Reading/Writing Instruction

Beverly D. Stratton
and
Martha C. Grindler

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CREATING A READING/WRITING ENVIRONMENT

In order to master spoken language, children need to produce it themselves, comprehend its use by others and have experiences using language in meaningful, functional ways. Children learn about spoken language when they are involved in its use; when it has the possibility of making sense to them. In the same way, children will try to understand written language by being involved in its use in situations where it makes sense to them and where they can generate and read language (Smith, 1988).

Writing begins with the will to say something to someone else (Temple, Nathan, Burris, & Temple, 1988). According to Balajthy (1989) students need opportunities to share creatively meaningful communication about themselves with others. Implementation of the Apple/Polaroid Language Experience Approach (A/PLX), an exciting, innovative extension of the language experience does just that. This approach can be used with preschoolers, with students K-12 in remedial and/or enrichment programs, and in adult literacy programs. It is considered a holistic approach because it is based on the whole language model of literacy which develops reading skills naturally through meaningful, functional use of language. Preliminary data suggest that this approach, which uses the student's natural language and environment, can increase sight vocabulary on pre-post test measures, can dissipate hostility toward reading and school, can create eager, willing learners, and can enhance parental involvement in reading/school.

The Project

An important aspect of teacher preparation is to provide prospective teachers with opportunities to work with individuals and small groups of students. The Apple/Polaroid Language Experience Approach (A/PLX) is an exciting extension of the language experience approach. (The concept of Polaroid Language Experience (PLX) is credited to Louis A. Oliastro in a Head Start program in Pennsylvania). A/PLX combines aspects of the language experience approach, photography, and word processing. This teaching/learning experience was designed to provide prospective teachers with an opportunity to interact with individual elementary students utilizing a "structured" reading/writing format.

Undergraduate college students enrolled in the Teaching of Reading were introduced to the A/PLX approach to reading/writing instruction. They were instructed in the use of the 40-column version of the Magic Slate word processing program. A pair of college tutors was assigned to work with an elementary grade student from the college's laboratory school. The elementary student had been identified by their classroom teacher as being able to profit from individualized instruction. The college students worked with the elementary students for approximately fifty minutes two times weekly for eight weeks.

Why A/PLX? The Apple/Polaroid Language Experience idea is a simple, relatively inexpensive, structured approach which can be quickly conveyed to "novice" teachers. Language experience uses the existing language and background experiences of the learner to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Photography, another form of communication, is used to improve observational skills, to stimulate children's thinking through the

use of a visual stimulus, and as a vehicle to share information and communicate with peers and with adults. Word processing, via the Apple computer, is considered a life skill that provides an individual with an efficient, effective means to communicate in writing. Studies indicate that the use of word processing encourages students to talk more, plan more, think more, and write and read more (Bradley, 1982; Collins, 1983; Kurland, 1983; Stromberg & Kurth, 1984).

The Process

The first step in the process was to explain to students that together the college tutor and the elementary student would take some photographs that would be made into a book about themselves. It was important to ascertain individual student interests and cooperatively decide on the subject or topic for the book's content. Five to six photographs should be taken for the first book. Other photographs can be added in the future.

Once a decision was made on the subject or topic of the book, the photographs were taken the way one normally takes photographs. It is important that the student be the center of attention. Photographers need to follow directions given with the Polaroid Sun camera to insure good photographs.

After all the photographs were taken, the students sequenced them--that is the students decided which pictures would appear first, second, etc. in their individual books. This sequence was used to assist the students in writing the story line for their books.

Once the students had sequenced the photographs, these photographs were used to stimulate students' thinking and writing skills. As students

generated language about the photographs, they typed their stories into the computer using Magic Slate, a 40-column version word processing program. The versatility of word processing allows the text to be read back immediately, stored on disk, and printed out for the students. Utilizing word processing software facilitated the writing process, particularly revising and editing the original manuscript. Rewriting and editing required students to make judgments about syntax, semantics, and whether the written account can be understood by others. Editing also provided an opportunity for students to develop a practical application of the dictionary as they checked the spelling of words in order to make their finished copy similar to "book" writing. Ultimately a book of photographs with accompanying text was compiled. The copy was clean, legible and professional looking.

A word bank of vocabulary words used in the story was developed. We utilized Make-A-Flash flashcard program from Teacher Support Software. Word activities were implemented to drill words thereby adding them to individual student's sight vocabularies. Word banks offer many opportunities for instructional activities. They can be used as a personal dictionary when composing new stories, for learning/practicing alphabetizing skills, to play word-matching, visual and auditory discrimination games. To develop comprehension skills they can be used in classification games asking such questions as which is a color word? A word which shows action? A word which names a place? Word banks are a rich resource for use in the teaching of reading.

Implementation in the Classroom

We learn to read by reading and to write by writing. The A/PLX approach

is an attractive way to engage children in active participation of the reading-writing process. It is through practice that children become experts. The A/PLX Approach is based on the premise that children can learn to read best by engaging in their own writing.

Whole Language proponents advocate learning from the familiar. Young and older children are egocentric and enjoy talking about themselves and their interests; i.e., that which is familiar. The personal photographs create a purpose for writing and ultimately a purpose for reading.

The paired association between the perspective teacher and the elementary student created a collaborative alliance. This alliance necessitated social interaction which, in turn, contributed to literacy learning (DeGroff, 1990).

Motivation is often the key to successful learning and teaching. Children's increased motivation to write and their pride in the finished products is very motivational for teachers as well. Students are proud of the professional look of their book and are eager to share them with parents and friends. Typically, student contributions to the class library are the first ones to be checked out.

The A/PLX approach guarantees two things: increased language use (an essential part of reading readiness) and improved self-concept (another important contributor to reading success). Children are anxious to begin their projects and then to share what they have created.

Too often, computer use in the classroom has been criticized because many software programs resemble electronic workbooks. The A/PLX activity allows children to engage in purposeful reading, writing, and thinking. It serves as a tool to communicate.

One problem to anticipate is the amount of time the children have access to the computers. Teachers must work out a management system in which project time is divided between word processing, photographing, and organizing the materials. Allowing the children to become involved in this planning is advantageous. And the final product is very much worth the energy invested.

Summary

Research indicates that learning about reading cannot be separated from learning about writing (Smith, 1988). The Apple/Polaroid Language Experience Approach is an exciting extension of the language experience approach which combines photography, a form of communication, and word processing skills. It is considered a holistic approach because it is based on the whole language model of teaching literacy which develops reading skills naturally through the meaningful, functional use of language. The approach offers something for all students regardless of the mode(s) through which they learn best since all modes are incorporated:

- the learners use the auditory mode when stories are read aloud and/or when a speech synthesizer is utilized:
- the kinesthetic (motor) and tactile (touch) mode when they write and type the stories;
- the visual mode with photographs and when they read the stories.

Motivation is provided through the use of photographs and word processing via the computer. Comprehension is built-in since the natural language of the learner is used. Children are given an opportunity to share something of importance - themselves.

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